https://doi.org/10.12797/RM.02.2020.08.10

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WOMEN'S LIBERATION IN MEIJI JAPAN: RUPTURES IN CULTURAL CONCEPTIONS OF FEMALE EDUCATION, SOCIAL ROLES, AND POLITICAL RIGHTS

Abstract

In 1872, the Meiji government issued the Education Act aiming to provide basic public education for boys and girls. The clash between Confucian ideals of women and the recently introduced Western literature on female liberation divided opinions among scholars. Having been influenced by the writings of British thinkers such as John Stuart Mill or Herbert Spencer, Japanese male and female thinkers proceeded to enlist various arguments in favor of female schooling and equal rights. Despite their advocating the right of women to attend schools, as well as their general agreement regarding the favorable results that girls' education could bring to the nation, it is possible to identify key differences among scholars concerning the content of girls' education and the nature of women's rights. This paper focuses on Kishida Toshiko, an important female figure in Meiji politics who not only fought for female education but also emerged at the forefront of activism in her advocacy of women's political rights and universal suffrage, showing the clear influence of British suffragette Millicent Garret Fawcett.

Keywords: Meiji Japan, feminism, women's suffrage, equal rights, female education

INTRODUCTION

The role that women would play in the new nation under construction and how the status of women would differ from the norms of the past was

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a topic of keen interest to Japanese thinkers of the late 19th century. The ideas of most male ideologues focused on a brand of education that would train women to become good wives and wise mothers, while excluding women from owning assets and political rights. There was, however, one female thinker who not only broke the silence over women's suffrage but also raised new debates about education, equal rights, and freedom.

This woman was Kishida Toshiko (1861–1901), who published, in 1884, in the Liberal Party Newspaper, *Jiyū no Tomoshibi* 自由の燈 (*The Light of Freedom*), the first essay on women's rights in Japan (Anderson, 2010, p. 51). This was the first in a series of ten installments titled *Dōhō Shimai ni Tsugu* 同胞姉妹に告ぐ (*To my Sisters*) coming after the end of her brief career as a lecturer, which had culminated in her imprisonment for giving a speech about female education entitled *Hakoiri Musume* 函入娘 (*Daughters in Boxes*) in the city of Ōtsu on October 12, 1883. The ideas contained in these and other works by Kishida reflect both her own responses to the circumstances reigning in Japan at that time, the lukewarm rhetoric of her male contemporaries, and the important and revolutionary ideological work she found being produced abroad, most notably that of British suffragist Millicent Fawcett. While the prominent male thinkers of the day espoused tepid ideas that proposed only the most moderate degree of change, Kishida found in the writings and thought of Fawcett a model for women's rights that she was able to apply to Japanese society, helping to inform her conception of a new age of equality and opportunity for women that went far beyond the ideas of her contemporaries.

FEMALE EDUCATION IN THE TRANSITION FROM THE SHOGUNATE TO IMPERIAL JAPAN

Kishida Toshiko 岸田俊子[2] (1861–1901) was born in Kyoto Prefecture to a merchant family. Her introduction to unorthodox ideas began at an early age with her mother Taka, who encouraged her to study Confucian literature in contradiction to the Neo-Confucian expectation that women need only study matters related to domestic affairs (Fujita, 1984, p. 80). Neo-Confucian thought played a significant role in Kishida's life and in women

[2] Kishida Toshiko had a variety of pennames including Nakajima Shōen 中島湘煙 and Shun Nyo or Shun Joしゅん女.

born during the Edo 江戸(1603–1868) and Meiji 明治periods (1868–1912). The *shi-nō-kō-shō* 士農工商 social stratification system regulated citizens into classes of samurai or *bushi* 士 (*shi*), farmers 農 (*nō*), craftsmen 工 (*kō*), and merchants 商 (*shō*), as well as was dictating what men and women of each class would study and how much they should learn.

Under the Tokugawa *bakufu* 幕府 or shogunate according to the model followed by the samurai, women born in this particular class had a marriage-oriented education, focusing on raising girls to perform household duties, along with a Neo-Confucian moral upbringing that dictated their obedience to their father, husband, or eldest son.[3] Not only were they thus constrained by a set of patriarchal rules, but they were also physically limited to the geographic realm of the home, as the realm of the household affairs was the place of a woman of virtue. Whereas men were educated for life outside the home, being encouraged to take part in politics, to learn the classics and statecraft, and to be eloquent; women would be instructed to constrict their emotions and remain focused on affairs happening within the walls of the home.

One of the best-known books for the education of samurai daughters was written by the Neo-Confucian scholar Kaibara Ekiken 貝原益軒 (1630–1714). *Onna Daigaku* 女大学[4] (*The Great Learning for Women*) contains several recommendations for young ladies who were entering the age of marriage, such as advice on how to avoid being sent back to their parents' home through divorce, recommendations not to leave the house unless considered necessary, and reminders of the necessity to always follow their husbands' orders, among other admonitions. It belonged to a genre of textbooks for female education called *jokunsho* 女訓書 (women's lessons books). Girls from the samurai class were educated by their mothers and grandmothers using such books as guides for good manners, along with practical training for housekeeping and traditional arts such as tea ceremonies and flower arranging. Nevertheless, the schools in the form of private academies provided by the shogunate were only available to their brothers (Tomida, 2004, p. 32).

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[3] The subservience of a woman towards her father, husband, and eldest son when widowed are called the "three obediences" (*sanjū*) and are listed in various books on women's education.

[4] It is not clear when Kaibara Ekiken first published *The Great Learning for Women*. In this work, the 1905 translation is used for direct quotations.

There were, however, alternate forms of education accessible to women. The daughters of wealthy farmers, artisans, and merchants, however, were able to attend temple schools run by Buddhist priests called *tera-koya* 寺子屋, learning the traditional arts but also subjects necessary to help run their family businesses, such as letter writing and using an abacus. Many were supposed to leave home and work in the shops that belonged to their fathers and husbands, which gave them more freedom to move and to access the outside world (Tomida, 2004, p. 33).

Kishida Toshiko was praised as an outstanding student, being awarded a prize by the city of Kyoto for her proficiency in the Chinese classics from an early age and attending both elementary and secondary public schools, although she did not graduate from the latter. Her talents were so well recognized that she became the first commoner to serve as an imperial tutor, teaching the Chinese classics to Empress Haruko 美子 for two years.

Kishida's academic development, though, mainly focused on elementary school and Confucian literature and was largely possible only because of the times in which she was born. As a result of her fortunate chronological positioning, she was able to attend elementary school, one of the many new institutions created by the Meiji government. To create a modern state, Meiji leaders sought to institutionalize education, promulgating, in 1872, the *Gakusei* 学制 (Fundamental Law of Education), which introduced a four-year compulsory education for boys and girls. This reform was what allowed Kishida, and other girls like her, to attend elementary school; at the same time, however, the seemly progressive character of the law generated a significant backlash from parents (Shamoon, 2012, p. 16).

The idea of allowing girls to attend mixed schools, learn the same subjects as boys, and even wear the same clothes and haircuts as them did little to foster among the general public a positive impression of female education as an appropriate and practical course of training for women.[5] Among the areas attracting criticism were such uninspiring results as the failure of the revised system to raise the rates of girls' school attendance. By 1878, 53.4 percent of boys and 22.5 percent of girls (Mackie, 2003, p. 25) attended school, but fourteen years later, in 1892, the latter figure still languished at 36.5 percent (Tomida, 2004, p. 37).

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[5] "Some of the first wave of girl students in the 1870s, however, attended boys' schools and adopted boys' clothing and even cut their hair short in a masculine style, which aroused considerable consternation" (Shamoon, 2012, p. 16).

The costs connected to education had some influence on low attendance numbers, as many parents opted to pay tuition fees for their sons and keep their daughters home-schooled or engaged them in domestic labor (Mackie, 2003, p. 25). However, the new school system's deviance from the established ideals of female education provided a further reason for some parents to keep their daughters at home:

> It was highly idealistic and had little to do with Japanese reality for many reasons. The curricula of elementary school education focused on a wide range of academic learning, failing to meet parents' requirements for their daughters' education, which they felt ought to include elements of practical training, such as sewing. As most parents felt that highly academic subjects would be of no use to girls, they strongly supported the conventional view that female education should be carried out at home. (Tomida, 2004, p. 38)

The criticism from elites and low attendance rates forced the government to remodel female education, resulting in the *kyōiku chokugo* 教育勅語 (Imperial Rescript on Education) in 1890, which included measures to standardize the curriculum of all girls' schools. The new focus was to encourage them to pursue the ideal that a strong nation needed strong and educated wives and mothers that could raise new citizens and run households with knowledge and refinement. Sewing, cooking, singing, and music lessons were now being taught, as well as classes that readopted the Neo-Confucian moral approach. In 1904, the attendance rate of girls reached 90 percent (Tomida, 2004, p. 40).

Kishida's career as a speechmaker begin at the height of the discussions concerning girls' school attendance and the place of Neo-Confucian ideals in education, shaping much of her early ideas. This was also the historic time, however, when censorship and the exercise of state power became increasingly employed as means of suppressing political gatherings and the citizens who participated in them.

KISHIDA AND THE FREEDOM AND PEOPLE'S RIGHTS MOVEMENT

Kishida's initial forays into public political speaking started in connection with the Freedom and People's Rights Movement (*Jiyū Minken Undō* 自由民権運動). This was a semi-coordinated wave of political activism centered

on achieving the goal of an elected national assembly that swept across the country in the late 1870's and into 1880's.

The movement drew influence from a number of British scholars, particularly Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) and Dame Millicent Garret Fawcett (1847–1929), whose works were being published in Japanese at the time[6]. Of particular interest to the activists was Spencer's idea of rights to liberty and freedom as natural and inalienable gifts from heaven that could not be interfered with or obviated by the state. Ueki Emori 植木枝盛, a journalist and central figure in the movement, showed the clear influence of Spencer when he declared that "rather than meddling in private affairs, the purpose of the government is to maintain order and protect liberty and rights of the people" (Howland, 2000, p. 74). This belief differed in fundamental ways from that of the ruling intellectual elite, who saw the private and the public as intrinsically connected.

Millicent Fawcett had her own distinctive influence on the activists of the Meiji period, both through her writings about economics and her ideas regarding women's liberation. Fawcett was born to a wealthy British merchant family and had, as a young woman, heard John Stuart Mill's speak on the topic of political rights in 1865. After her marriage to Henry Fawcett (1833–1884), a member of the parliament representing the Liberal Party, she followed his suggestion that she become politically active and began a career as a speechmaker and economist (Sekiguchi, 1999, p. 37). News of Fawcett quickly reached Japan, brought by intellectuals such as Ono Azusa 小野梓 and Furusawa Shigeru 古沢茂 who attended her speeches while studying in England. She enjoyed significant fame among Japanese academics, with her *Political Economy for Beginners* (1870), a work even being used in Japanese schools (Sekiguchi, 1999, p. 37), where she was incongruously offered up as a living example of the ideal of a "civilized woman" (Sekiguchi, 1999, p. 39).

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[6] Spencer's *Social Statics* (1851) was translated partially in 1878 by Ozaki Yukio and in 1881 by Matsushima Kō, who were members of the Freedom and People's Rights Movement. Other translations were published by the magazine *Gakugei Shirin* between 1879 and 1883 (Howland, 2000, p. 70). Fawcett's *Essays and Lectures on Social and Political Subjects* (1872) was translated by Shibuya Zōji in 1883, while the essay *The Electoral Disabilities of Women* was translated in 1881 by Kunihara Ryōichi from the Freedom and People's Rights Movement.

Furusawa Shigeru, who is said to have attended one of Fawcett's speeches while studying in England, was at the time a member of the Constitutional Party and, in Osaka, had a very close partnership with Ueki Emori, one of the main voices of The Freedom and People's Rights Movement (Sekiguchi, 2016, pp. 181–183). After resigning from her position as a court tutor, Kishida Toshiko set off on a trip to the south of Japan with her mother Taka, during which she first encountered the Freedom and People's Rights Movement in Tosa on Shikoku. One of the activists she met was Ueki Emori who, at the time, was a speaker on women's rights. He arranged Kishida's first speech *Fujo no Michi* 婦女の道 (*The Way of Women*) in Dōtonbori in Osaka, for an audience of more than 2,000 people, at the same meeting during which Furusawa delivered a lecture.

In 1882, Kishida Toshiko was introduced as follows in the *Nihon Rikken Seitō Shinbun* 日本立憲政党新聞 (Japan Constitutional Party Newspaper) of March 31, one day before her first speech sponsored by that party:

> We must say that she is in fact a strange woman. It is said that in the next days, she will be eagerly advocating for the rights of women. We are looking forward to the rise of a Fawcett in the East in a few years. (cited in Suzuki, 1985, p. 232)

From the beginning of her career, Kishida was already being connected to Fawcett. She proceeded to work as an activist, lecturing in Kumamoto, Kyoto, Okayama, Shiga, and other places over the following year.

Even as she began her work, however, the Freedom and People's Rights Movement was already beginning to face a backlash from the Meiji government. In order to control the movement, the government passed the *Shūkai Jōrei* (Meetings Law) (1880), which dictated that every political meeting must obtain prior approval from the police (Anderson, 2010, p. 43). In addition, officers were dispatched as observers to political gatherings, reserving the right to disperse the audience and cancel any activities that met their disapproval.

Kishida encountered the force of this new counter-initiative as a result of her speech *Daughters in Boxes* in 1883, when she was arrested and immediately imprisoned (something considered rare at the time), accused of engaging in political discussions during a meeting that was supposed to be for academic purposes only. She was judged to have thus violated the Public Assembly Act and to have disrespected the authorities.

In spite of the Freedom and People's Rights Movement's chief goals of demanding a constitution and protesting against rises in taxes, Kishida found in it an opportunity to transmit her ideas regarding education. The audiences gathered at people's rights' events provided her with a means of addressing the female public and allowed her ideas to gain traction more broadly in society. In *Daughters in Boxes*, she was talking specifically to mothers regarding the responsibilities they had over their daughters' education and criticizing the custom of preventing girls from attending school and instead raising them within the home.

At the time, the topic of motherhood still drew the attention of the scholarly elite. Whereas the earlier view contained expectations that women of the samurai class perform the role of wife, this was supplanted in the 1870's with the new understanding of the goal of female education as raising girls to become suitable mothers, as we will discuss in the next section.

CONTEMPORARY DISCUSSIONS ON EDUCATION AND MOTHERHOOD

Kishida went far beyond her contemporaries when addressing the mothers of daughters, acknowledging not only their power over the future of their children but also their important role in ensuring their daughters to obtain a formal education. At the time, the ruling elite was still trying to argue over what the duties of Japanese women should be, and newly accessible examples from other countries allowed scholars like Mori Arinori, Fukuzawa Yukichi and Nakamura Masanao[7] to turn their gaze to practices adopted by Western countries concerning the raising of boys and girls.

After returning from the United States, the Japanese consul Mori Arinori 森有礼 (1847–1889), who would later become the Minister of Education, had the idea in 1873 to form a society of scholars dedicated to discussing the topics of modernization and Westernization. The Meirokusha 明六社 (The Meiji Six Society) was known as the leading intellectual group of the Civilization and Enlightenment Movement, formed by scholars

[7] For a longer exposition of those three scholars' ideas see Shibukawa Hisako (1976).

"knowledgeable about the West, and worried about Japan's inferior position in the face of the West. Expressly in order to remedy this situation, they formed a society to educate the public" (Huish, 1972, p. 211) in different subjects, such as moral, liberalism, natural sciences, and utilitarian ideas. It is from their magazine *Meiroku Zasshi* 明六雑誌 (Meiji Six Journal) that the debates over Westernization and modernity appeared in print and spread throughout the country. Female rights and education were also part of their agenda.

One of the members of the Meirokusha, Nakamura Masanao 中村正直 (1832–1891), also known as Nakamura Keiu, was closely linked with female education, serving as the principal of the first institution of higher education for women in Japan, the Tokyo Women's Normal School 東京女子師範学校 *Tōkyō Joshi Kihan Gakkō* (currently Ochanomizu University). In 1875, the scholar published an essay called *Zenryō naru haha o tsukuru setsu* 善良なる母を造る説 (*Creating Good Mothers*) in issue thirty-three of *Meiroku Zasshi*, a work that laid out the beginnings of the "good wife, wise mother" (*ryōsai kenbo* 良妻賢母), ideal of women that spread in Meiji period education.

Nakamura starts his essay explaining manner of reforming the character of the Japanese people and renewing their minds, then proceeds to argue that educating women is an important tool to achieve changes in the next generation. He believed that "we must invariably have fine mothers if we want effectively to advance the people to the area of enlightenment and to alter their customs and conditions for the good". It followed that "if the mothers are superb, they can have superb children, and Japan can become a splendid country in later generations" (Nakamura, 1875 [1976], pp. 401–402).

This essay demonstrates how important it was for scholars of the time to reform old customs, e.g. Neo-Confucian thought, viewed as obstacles to the path toward the European concept of the Enlightenment. For Nakamura, the change should begin with the education of girls in order for them to raise their future children in accordance with the new era Japan was entering. In other words, women were to become a tool to enhance the intellectual character of the population.

Thus, motherhood was being introduced through a utilitarian point of view, since it was not just for the benefit of girls themselves that Nakamura was advocating this, but for the well-being of Japanese society. This utilitarian mode of thought might have been the result of the influence of

John Stuart Mill,[8] whose essay *On Liberty* was translated by Nakamura and became a best seller in Japan. Mill also argued in his essay *The Subjection of Women* (1869), that "the influence of mothers on the early character of their sons" were "important agencies in the formation of character and have determined some of the chief steps in the progress of civilization" (Mill, 1869 [1989], p. 200).

This ideal represented a rupturing away from Confucian education, in which the raising of children was the responsibility of the father. The wife should act according to the husband's desires, but not take the lead on how they should be educated, or not, as the case may be. *The Great Learning for Women*, for example, concentrates on the "woman's duties as wife and daughter-in-law, and does not include advice about child-rearing" (Ballhatchet, 2017, p. 14). Nakamura thus seeks to modify this custom and to give the mother the main power over the intellectual development of her children (though only after the mother had gained an adequate formal education).

Mill also points out that women had no power over their own children since "they are by law *his* [the husband's] children. He alone has any legal right over them. Not one act can she do towards or in relation to them, except by delegation from him" (Mill, 1869 [1989], p. 148). This aspect of Mill's thought was echoed by Fukuzawa Yukichi 福澤諭吉 (1835–1901), another contributor to *Meiroku Zasshi* who published a variety of works regarding female education, rights, and societal roles. After the Meiji Restoration he established himself not as a politician but mainly as an educator, founding the *Keiō Gijuku* 慶応義塾 (currently Keiō University), and is still regarded as one of the most important scholars of the period. As he "was mainly interested in improving the situation of Meiji women of the middle level of society and above" (Ballhatchet, 2017, p. 13), when referring to women in his writings it is with this particular type in mind. His criticisms

[8] John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) was widely read by the members of the Civilization and Enlightenment Movement, as his ideas "represented an attempt to inculcate bourgeois values such as freedom and independence, as a foil, to feudalism" (Haves, 1968, p. 224). Another justification for the spread of Mill's writings among the elite was that the utilitarian concepts he developed were "essentially a social, not an individual, philosophy and was therefore more easily grasped by the Confucian-trained minds" (Havens, 1968, p. 224). Consequently, since the elite was pursuing Western thought as a way to improve Japanese people's lives, it would be also incorporated into their education to some extent.

on how women were raised and treated in Japan probably came from the experiences he had while traveling, which enabled him to reevaluate aspects of Japanese society and start discussing how to change them.

Fukuzawa argued that "it is natural that the work involving the raising and feeding of children should fall to the wife, but they are more her husband's children than her own" (Fukuzawa, 1885 [2017], p. 77), which would ultimately make the wife a "mere instrument for producing children" (Fukuzawa, 1885 [2017], p. 78). He concludes by saying that "women in Japan do not bring up any children of their own, they only look after the children of their husbands" (Fukuzawa, 1885 [2017], p. 78), since they have no authority over their education. His main argument is that, until recent years, women were not seen as "mothers" but as "borrowed wombs", whose main purpose in life was to provide a male heir, passively consenting to divorce and abandonment in cases where they were not able to provide one (Fukuzawa, 1885 [2017], pp. 118–120). In order to stop this, he claims that it is important to give the mother equal responsibility over her children; however, he does not go further to say that legal guardianship should also be passed to the mother, as Mill does. Once more, a modest rupturing away from Confucian ideals is presented through an apparent revolutionary argument.

Similar to Nakamura's ideas, for Fukuzawa a mother that is to take part in the education of her children must first herself be educated. When criticizing how women were taught in the past, he places the blame for children's insufficient intellectual and physical development on the women of the samurai class. He argues that many children of feudal lords and "high-ranking families were weak in intellect and lacked physical vitality, the reason being that the ladies of the nobility knew how to bring forth children but not how to raise them" (Fukuzawa, 1899 [2017], p. 271). Thus, in his opinion, it is necessary to involve the mother in every aspect of the child's daily life, from breastfeeding, clothing, to hygiene and beyond, and he adds that since motherhood is the "vocation to which women have been called" (Fukuzawa, 1899 [2017], p. 270), these duties cannot be performed by servants.

Both Fukuzawa and Nakamura lay out details for the concept of motherhood, something that was not connected with children's education in the Edo period. For instance, *The Great Learning for Women* states that "in the education of her children, her [the mother's] blind affection induces an erroneous system" (Kaibara & Takaishi, 1905, p. 45) and they should

thus not be entrusted with it but must follow the orders of the husband. Therefore, through the terms Fukuzawa continuously presents alongside the word "mother", such as "vocational", "natural work", and "special domain of women", he seeks to naturalize something that was not previously part of what was expected of the wives of the elite.

However, when one take's a closer look at Fukuzawa's writings, his ultimate goal does not seem to be the improvement of women's lives but is rather wrapped up in his concerns about Japanese inferiority to Europe and the United States. Fukuzawa specifies this twice in his writings. First, in the conclusion of his first essay regarding this topic, *On Japanese Women* (1885), he explains:

> Again, the basic purpose of my argument is not to plead on women's behalf so that they can fight with men over the possession of rights. My purpose is the improvement of the Japanese race. Since there is no point in relying on the women of today to produce a better quality of descendent. (Fukuzawa, 1885 [2017], p. 103)

According to this quote, we can understand that even though he was in fact writing for and about women, he did not consider himself an advocate of women's rights. In addition, despite Fukuzawa's criticism about the idea of treating women as an instrument for producing children, one of his purposes is clearly to educate women so they can produce better children.

Although Fukuzawa's disapproval of the Confucian ideals still being taught to girls in Meiji Japan[9] is well-known, both his and Nakamura's justification for female education is the intrinsic connection between the family and the state. Even the concepts of Mill may only have been adopted because they were not entirely incompatible with Neo-Confucian doctrine.

Confucianism played an important role in the development of government policies regarding individuals since the shogunate. Ideals that dictated that respect towards the patriarch of the family was also loyalty for the ruler were directly imported from Neo-Confucian ideology and adapted to fit the shogunate's view of samurai loyalty. This was brought into the Meiji state to support the view of the emperor as the father of all Japanese

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[9] In 1899 he published *A Critique of The Great Learning for Women* in which he analyzes each chapter of the book and criticizes passages he sees as inappropriate. Along with the essay he also proposes his own version of the book called *A New Great Learning for Women*.

citizens, creating the family-state (*kazoku-kokka*), where the reverence for the father was transported to the public dimension of reverence for the emperor. Nevertheless, Confucianism did not remain related only to statecraft in the shogunate, as it was also applied within families, notably defining gender roles for its members and placing women as a means of preserving a household (Noriyo, 2014, p. 85).

Consequently, in spite of the adoption of Western knowledge to break from early modern cultural concepts, the changes both Fukuzawa and Nakamura proposed were still deemed plausible within the framework of family-state government policies, which is probably the reason why their school of thought became the mainstream ideas of the time.

RAISING GIRLS WITH FREEDOM: KISHIDA TOSHIKO'S *DAUGHTERS IN BOXES* (1883)

Kishida saw in female education not a tool for raising future generations, nor practical training for motherhood but was instead concerned about girls who were at that moment deprived of school and freedom of mobility because of their mothers' expectations.

A "Daughter in a Box", in Japanese, Hakoiri Musume (written as 箱入り娘 or 函入娘), is the custom of raising girls inside their houses without contact with the outside world in order to protect them. Kishida lamented the fact that girls were prevented from taking up activities outside the home or attending public schools in order to preserve them for marriage. Kishida argues that this restriction of their freedom could only be harmful to them, taking issue with the fact that such customs targeted only females and casting doubt upon parents: "we cannot help questioning whether it is truly love that these parents have for their daughters. For do they not cause their daughters to suffer?" (Kishida, 1883 [2006], p. 63).

In her speech, she presents an example of three boxes that, in her opinion, limit the lives of girls, not only physically, but also mentally. The first box was Neo-Confucian education, as seen in *The Great Learning for Women*, which is a box that Kishida in fact judges to have some value since it passes on to "daughters an appreciation for knowledge" and is "is far more cultivated". The second box is the practice of secluding girls in the inner rooms, with the entrance "barricaded by a long blind". The third box

is the demand for a girl's blind obedience to her parents, "who expect her to obey their every word without complaint". This is especially addressed to the mother, who in Kishida's view "abusively wields her power over her daughter and is otherwise hateful in her treatment of her child" (Kishida, 1883 [2006], p. 64). Therefore, the boxes are a metaphor for the treatment of girls in Meiji Japan.

For Kishida, the role of both fathers and mothers is to respect the individuality and the freedom of their daughters, a radical opinion for the time that clearly proposed a rupture with the Confucian ideas of homeschooling girls for marriage and confining them to their home unless leaving it was strictly necessary.

Kishida adds that if the custom may have served any purpose before, it is now obsolete, because "daughters know perfectly well that God the Creator has endowed them with liberty" (Kishida, 1883 [2006], p. 67). This passage of her speech mixes two opposing philosophies in vogue during the period, one that perceived Confucian educational ideals as an obstacle to improvement and another connected with the discussions surrounding British female liberation, which insisted that women were entitled with the same freedom of upbringing as men.

Herbert Spencer declared that the exercise of one's faculties was God's will and that the undertaking of this exercise required liberty, meaning human beings have the right to liberty (Spencer, 1851, p. 76), with Fawcett echoing this belief in her declaration that "God wills man's happiness, and man's happiness can be obtained only by the exercise of his faculties" (Fawcett & Fawcett, 1872, p. 239). This idea resonates with Kishida's concepts of how parents could not restrict their daughters' mobility, since freedom was bestowed by the Heavens and could not be taken by human hands. The fact that Kishida is targeting parents in this speech may be an attempt to convince mothers to allow their daughters to attend school. As we saw at the time of this speech in 1883, female education was not only being criticized as unfeminine, but school attendance rates were also extremely low.

During her speeches, Fawcett similarly claimed that the only way to change the education of girls was in fact to persuade parents to allow their daughters to attend higher education institutions. While advocating women's right to attend university, she argued that this could only "have a good effect in inducing parents to give their daughters a sound mental training" and that "a high education greatly adds to their [daughters']

social attractiveness, and also to their moral excellence" (Fawcett & Fawcett, 1872, p. 224). She argues that "the creation of an effectual demand on the part of those who have the power to purchase improved education for girls – i.e. parents – is most essential" because "without the formation of such a demand all efforts to improve the intellectual training of women must ultimately prove abortive" (Fawcett & Fawcett, 1872, p. 213).

Since parents have the power over their daughters' education, it is through changing their minds that girls would be able to pursue more knowledge, and in Japan's situation, be allowed to attend school. Therefore, we see an insistence in Kishida's statements to address mothers:

> Eight or nine out of ten mothers in our society today believe that they have accomplished their duty if their daughters, once married, are not sent home in divorce. It does not even occur to them that their daughters might deserve higher goals. How can these mothers successfully accomplish their tasks when their expectations for their daughters are so low? (Kishida, 1883 [2006], p. 65)

With pointed comments such as this, Kishida seems to be trying to convince parents, especially mothers, that education would not be an impediment to a successful marriage. She adds that "there are some who argue, with exceedingly boorish logic, that learning is an obstacle to a woman's successful marriage. This argument is particularly specious. Women need learning" (Kishida, 1883 [2006], p. 65). In addition, she more than once argues that women should attend school first before being sent to be married as knowledge was the most important thing women could acquire and that something was needed in order for women to be able to survive adulthood without relying completely upon their husbands.

> And what are the subjects she should study? Economics and ethics. Although a woman lives under her husband's protection for most of her life, the day may come when he should die. Then she should fortify herself with her moral training and plan her future with her financial knowledge. Thus, these subjects, when taken together, form the most important item a woman will bring to her marriage. (Kishida, 1883 [2006], p. 65)

Kishida, in contrast to Nakamura and Fukuzawa, came from the merchant class, in which women had had more responsibilities and the independence to take part in the family's business and domestic affairs. When speaking to urban audiences, she was reaching precisely this type of woman.

In addition, she did not assume that women had no say in their daughters' education and that the society of that time only now made it necessary that they be trained to do so. She understood that mothers already shared authority over their children's education with their husbands and added that parents needed to learn to respect their children individually, arguing that "'to parent' does not mean 'to torment', and so parents today should take the interests of their daughters to heart" (Kishida, 1883 [2006], p. 67).

Therefore, her justification for female education was not exclusively focused on the future generation and the necessity to train mothers to raise them, but aimed at changing the raising of young girls at that time, because it was not possible to "cultivate the human spirit to its full and brilliant potential if we restrict its freedom" (Kishida, 1883 [2006], p. 68). While acknowledging the power of mothers, she argued that this power was not be used to perpetuate customs that restrict their children but instead become a tool to raise girls with freedom (Kishida, 1883 [2006], p. 67).

As we saw, the concepts of freedom and individuality were important concepts to the movement that Kishida belonged to following their introduction to the Japanese language during the Meiji period. The contact she had with British scholars certainly helped her to formulate and adapt these ideas into her speeches. In order to argue against elements of cultural practice she judged harmful to girls' development in the new Meiji society, Kishida used recent works in Western philosophy to advocate female education.

PROPERTY RIGHTS AND ENFRANCHISEMENT: KISHIDA TOSHIKO'S *TO MY SISTERS*

Kishida wrote the first Japanese essay on women's rights, entitled *Dōho shimai ni tsugu* (*To My Sisters*) and published in the Liberal Party journal, *Jiyū no tomoshibi* (*The Light of Freedom*). In this work, she not only advances the discussion of equal rights, but also advocates female political participation, something that other scholars of the time were not even discussing. She acknowledges all women as residing within the same space and asks for her fellow sisters to demand their rights as well.

Property Rights

The question of property ownership varied according to place, class, and time. Since Japan was not a unified nation until the Meiji period, most of the population's customs were different in each feudal domain, village, and family, even during the same period of history. For instance, documents from the early 1600's attest that, in agricultural areas, women could inherit property and lands from their fathers or husbands.[10] Female heads of households also existed in early modern Japan, representing their families in communities and handling finances. In addition, at the village level, the heads of each family could vote in local elections, regardless of their sex, which gave some women the possibility to take part in their regional political systems.

It was the samurai class that adopted strict rules of property ownership, basing their customs on a Neo-Confucian approach. The family assets were inherited by the eldest son, who would eventually obtain patriarchal power over the entire family. Furthermore, wealthier merchant and artisan families emulated the primogeniture practices of the samurai elite in order to avoid having their authority and property split among their children (Mackie, 2003, p. 23).[11] In cases where a family had no male heir, a man would be adopted into the family, marrying the daughter, and succeeding as the head of the clan.

In Meiji Japan, the custom of primogeniture was regulated by the Meiji Civil Code promulgated in 1898, which consolidated the Japanese family as a patriarchal system, giving the head of the household absolute power over the family. If the patriarch died before a male heir was born, it was still possible for women to hold the head position[12] until a son was adopted or married into the family.

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[10] For documents analyzing the inheritance practices of wealthy and small farmers, see Miyashita, 1990.

[11] Though not common, Marnie Anderson (2010, p. 24) points out that other "scholars have identified cases where women became householeads even when there were eligible men", presenting the example of female succession in a merchant family in Osaka. This demonstrates how headship patterns were diversified during the Edo period and supports Anderson's position that, in this period, the status women held was more significant than their gender.

[12] However, even the women that held the position of the head of a household were not able to vote in the elections in which their male counterparts were able to vote, excluding them from politics specifically because of their gender.

In his essay, *On Japanese Women* (1885), Fukuzawa criticized the fact that women had no right to inherit and possess assets and that even those women who held the position of head of household would eventually have all their belongings automatically transferred to another man as soon as they remarried or adopted a son (Fukuzawa, 1885 [2017], pp. 78–79). For him, the fact that woman could even lose private belongings, such has clothing and jewelry, if the husband decided to sell them and divorce her afterwards was proof that women had to rely on "the good will of men: the security and destiny of the former lie in the hands of the latter" (Fukuzawa, 1885 [2017], p. 79). Mill, when discussing a similar situation in *The Subjection of Women*, states that a wife "can acquire no property but for him; the instant it becomes hers, even by inheritance, it becomes *ipso facto* his" (Mill, 1869 [1989], p. 147) and points out that, even in a case in which an arrangement is made so that only the wife can receive income from her properties, if the husband takes it by personal violence, he can "neither be punished, nor compelled to restitution" (Mill, 1869 [1989], p. 147). While Fukuzawa lamented the analogous situation in Japan, he made no suggestions beyond expressing his disapproval.

Kishida claims in the fourth installment of *To my Sisters* that, since women are not able to own a house or any property of their own, they live like geishas under the mercy of their patrons, in this case the head of the household. For her, this places women in a supportive position in the house, whose only work is to serve, manage the domestic affairs, and sleep next to their husbands, thus no different from a slave (Kishida, 1884 [2002], p. 12). This situation had its origins in the Confucian ideas that dominated during the shogunate (Kishida, 1884 [2002], p. 12) and though the system had already collapsed, this custom continued to dictate family circumstances (Kishida, 1884 [2002], p. 13).

However, Kishida had an optimistic view toward this topic, arguing that women had started to change this situation by their own means. There were already women from outside the nobility who earned the post of the head of household, and women who could retain their own property and possess their own savings, as heads of their own households appeared in all levels of society (Kishida, 1884 [2002], pp. 13–14). She held these up as examples of women showing that, despite the regulations imposed to prevent them from owning their own property, there were those who were able to overcome it and forge a different path.

In fact, there is a possibility that Kishida met with Kusunose Kita 楠瀬喜多 (1833–1892) during the former's stay in Kōchi.[13] She was the first woman in Japan to petition to be allowed to vote based on her position as head of household, a demand that earned her the title of *Minken no obaasan* 民権のおばあさん (Grandmother of the Freedom Movement). "Kusunose drafted a petition to the prefectural governor and later to the Home Ministry", in which "she claimed that because her right to vote had been denied, she was under no obligation to pay taxes" (Anderson, 2010, p. 28). Although Kusunose was considered a leading female speaker on suffrage at the time, her demand centered on her position as a head of household and was not a call for generalized women's rights (Anderson, 2010, pp. 28–29).

Kishida may have written the fourth installment of *To My Sisters* to inform others that more comprehensive change was possible. In a time in which women lacked public representation, this may have been a way to demonstrate to her readers how there were others who were also not living according the strict set of rules the government had determined for them. According to Marnie Anderson (2010, p. 51), "few women contributed to the suffrage debates, at least in print. Besides Kusunose, the one other exception came in 1884" with Kishida's essay.

Fawcett's Influences and Female Suffrage

In a government of Confucian-trained rulers, the idea of women participating in state affairs was far from a priority. According to Sharon Nolte (1986, p. 694), "the ideal of a more assertive, informed homemaker was introduced during the 1880s by American missionaries, as well as by Japanese male progressives", such as Mori Arinori, Fukuzawa Yukichi, and Nakamura Masanao. In other words, the rupture with previous cultural norms for women and the construction of a new role model was traced and narrated through the words of these scholars. However, despite their close contact with British intellectuals and their writings regarding women's liberation, these intellectuals seemed to shy away from the topics of equal rights and female suffrage in their works. In other words, despite studying abroad and reading and translating a variety of Victorian authors, they neglected to deal with what should have been one of their most significant subjects.

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[13] See footnote number seven written by Takada Chinami in the annotated version of *Dōho shimai ni tsugu* (Takada, Nakagawa & Nakayama 2002, p. 13).

On the other hand, Kishida's *To My Sisters* is an essay profoundly influenced by Victorian authors such as Spencer and Fawcett that does not shy away from the sensitive topic of female political rights. The essay consists of Kishida's arguments against a variety of mainstream ideas as to why women are not entitled to equal rights in the Meiji political sphere, with one of the first targets of her verbal disapproval being the ruling elite.

In the first installment of the essay, while condemning the idea that men and women could have the same status and receive the same rights because men were strong and women weak, she states:

> If physical strength or weakness is going to be how we divide who do we respect or despise, then men should also measure themselves by who is the strongest […] the Sumo grand Champion Umegatani and Tateyama should be in the highest ranks in the government, as regents or chief advisors; while the pale men of Japanese nobility should be even below the new commoners.[14] (Kishida, 1884 [2002], p. 4)

Kishida found in Fawcett a model of a living woman activist that could provide her with the means to argue against issues that she saw in the political circumstances that surrounded her. The passage above shows how she was able to take Fawcett's arguments for suffrage and transform them in a way that addressed the ruling class in Japan. As Fawcett had said in her lecture entitled *The Electoral Disabilities of Women* (1872):

> I have yet to learn that a certain standard of physical strength is in this country a necessary qualification for the suffrage. Those who urge this objection would probably desire a "putting the weight" Reform Bill; and would like to see a cabinet composed of prize-fighters,[15] athletes, acrobats and ballet girls. (Fawcett, 1872, p. 244)

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[14] Kishida uses the word *shinheimin* 新平民, which means literally "new commoner". This was a common derogatory way to refer to the outcast group known as the *burakumin* 部落民, who had for centuries been considered the lowest social stratum and subject to a variety of prejudices. The Meiji government when abolishing the class system, recognized the *burakumin* as equal with all other citizens, hence the designation "new commoner".

[15] In both of the Japanese translations of this lecture, prizefighters are referred to as sumo fighters. Kishida adds the name of the two main sumo rivals at the time, Umegatani and Tateyama, as clearer examples (Takada, Nakagawa, Nakayama, 2002, p. 4).

Although Kishida may be engaging in hyperbole when arguing that sumo wrestlers should be leaders in a world ruled by the strongest, so too is Fawcett's argument, and both of them engage in similar mockery of the actual political arguments that then surrounded the discussion of equal rights. The ruling elite in Japan's case was composed of former samurai, who had military roots at the beginning of the Edo period but gradually turned their hand to working as bureaucrats in the decades of peace that followed. The fact that Kishida compares them to sumo wrestlers may be connected to the idea of a military class that was at that point far from being physically strong.

Fawcett's *The Electoral Disabilities of Women* is aimed at sixteen arguments given by British men for not allowing women the right to vote. Kishida writes her essay in a similar manner, applying it to the political situation that surrounded her. It is also possible to detect other influences than Fawcett in a variety of topics discussed in *To My Sisters*.[16] Fawcett represented a Western female contemporary who fought for the same goals as Kishida and was a well-known scholar even in Japan. To have Fawcett as a backup to her arguments would be enough to demonstrate that women were also capable of stepping into politics. In her essay, Kishida addresses women directly, demanding their participation:

> Oh men, you open your mouths constantly to brag about progress and revolution, but only when it comes to the topic of equal rights do you keep idolizing the old custom? Following mundane conventions? To my dear, loving, sisters! Reform long-standing abuses, break with the old customs, and smash the delusional dreams of those heartless men! (Kishida, 1884 [2002], p. 28)

Kishida criticizes not only those who opposed equal rights but also people who read Western publications discussing reforms and revolution and purposely avoided the topic. In other words, how could representatives of the Civilization and the People's Enlightenment movement denounce Confucian ideals in favor of ideas from the West in general but still adhere to the aspects of Neo-Confucianism that prevented women from being involved with anything related to the state and which seemed

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[16] For all of the influences of Fawcett's *The Electoral Disabilities of Women* on *To my Sister,* see the notes written by Takada Chinami (Takada, Nakagawa & Nakayama, 2002) in the annotated version of *Dōho shimai ni Tsugu*.

to inhibit the urgent discussion of female political participation. This is the rhetorical question that Kishida proposed to her male contemporaries involved in political discussion.

Without waiting for a response, her tenth and last installment speaks even more directly to the scholarly elite:

> Equal rights have yet to be obtained in the so-called Civilized and Enlightened Western nations. This is because in the West men have the right to suffrage, to become members of the parliament, and to vote for its members, while women have not been entitled to even one of those rights. This is proof that there are no equal rights between men and women there. (Kishida, 1884 [2002], p. 28)

For Kishida, the Western nations are not the best example to follow in the case of equal rights, and her use of the words "Civilized" and "Enlightened" is done in a manner that addresses those scholars who look to Western nations as to the ultimate model for Japan. A model that has not reached equality for women, therefore, cannot be considered completely civilized. She adds that "the Western countries are only considered civilized in comparison with undeveloped countries" and for this reason it was "not possible to say that they have acquired the most outstanding level of civilization", adding that "even in the Western civilized nations there are many things that are immoral, unreasonable, ugly, and bad" (Kishida, 1884 [2002], p. 29). Consequently, in order to demand equality in those nations women had also started to gather and make public their wish to be politically active:

> Accordingly, it is because the equal rights not been completely attained in the so-called civilized England and France that the female scholar named Fawcett has appeared in this world, diligently giving her best in order to fix this mistake. Also, nowadays intellectual women have been gathering and started to demand for the right to vote in the parliament with vigor. Thus, since in the Western countries real equal rights will be soon attained, it is clear that we should reflect this as a mirror from now on. (Kishida, 1884 [2002], pp. 29–30)

To My Sisters is an essay written by a woman that asks for women's participation and uses quotes from works by women. Kishida shows not only different examples of intelligent women during the essay, but she also repeatedly asks for Japanese women to take part in the discussion. The fact that she did not ignore political activity and made her support

for suffrage public demonstrates how she was able to break with her Neo-Confucian upbringing in a way neither Fukuzawa nor Nakamura were. While ending the silence over suffrage, she was able to address a variety of topics that were far from the mainstream discussions regarding women. Although here Fawcett provides a model, it is Kishida's words that ask for the true abandonment of the Confucian ideals that were still being imposed on women's lives.

CONCLUSION

Kishida's *Daughters in Boxes* and *To My Sisters* demonstrate how her conceptions of female education, political participation, and social roles went far beyond those of her contemporaries. The writings of Fawcett provided an important resource in the construction of these works, serving as a model for developing her own arguments, as well as asking for women to take part in the discussion. The way Fawcett's ideas were adapted to the Japanese context and mobilized in ways that addressed the particular characteristics of Japanese political and social life, however, came from Kishida herself and reflect her unique insight into the times in which she lived and a degree of political acuity that more than matched her male contemporaries.

Six years after the publication of *To My Sisters*, the new Assembly and Political Association Law entirely eliminated any chance for female suffrage and political participation, banning women from attending political meetings or joining political parties. Kishida Toshiko continued her career as a writer for *Jogaku zasshi* 女学雑誌 (*Women's Studies Journal*), presenting her ideas with more moderation than she had during her politically active years.

The Meiji period was a time when people were faced with the choice to preserve or to part with elements of cultural heritage that had been constant over generations of their families. Though a variety of changes had shaken Japanese society, in the case of women, Western philosophy was adapted in a way that did not erase the social aspects of Neo-Confucianism. Through Kishida's publications, however, we can understand that even though women were portrayed as (and even encouraged to be) submissive and obedient, this was not always the case. The earlier reforms to the school system and other changes helped encourage women such as Kishida to start forming their own opinions and many others, such as

Fukuda Hideko 福田英子, Tsuda Umeko 津田梅子, Itō Noue 伊藤井上, or Hiratsuka Raichō 平塚らいてう, to emerge as assertive actors after acquiring a formal education and claim their place in Japanese history.

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